United Nations A/62/593

General Assembly

Distr.: General
18 December 2007

Original: English

Sixty-second session
Agenda item 140
Administrative and budgetary aspects of the financing of the United Nations peacekeeping operations

Peacekeeping Best Practices

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 61/276, the present report provides an overview of the policy on capturing best practices in peacekeeping, including how information on best practices is being utilized in mission planning, as well as efficiency gains and improvements in effectiveness made as a result of those efforts. The report describes the methodology and tools that have been used for managing best practices in peacekeeping operations since the introduction in 2005 of a new system for these activities. This new system links the identification and sharing of best practices in the field to the development of guidance materials (policies, guidelines and procedures) that reflect those lessons. These guidance materials form an institutional doctrine that is disseminated through training programmes, electronic information management platforms and Best Practices Officers in missions. The report includes an initial assessment of the early impact of the system, highlighting the resulting improvements in efficiency and effectiveness as well as in mission planning.

07-65152 (E) 100108

I. The need for knowledge-sharing and institutional guidance

1. United Nations peacekeeping has evolved into a global undertaking on an unprecedented scale. The scope and complexity of the activities conducted in multidimensional operations and the need for rapid deployment and efficiency in the use of resources require that a professional approach be taken to the way in which operations are managed. As noted in the report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations issued in 2000, missions have much to gain from sharing best practices, applying lessons learned and referring to a body of guidance[1] that transmits tested methods of carrying out peacekeeping tasks (see A/55/305-S/2000/809, para. 229). The sharing and issuance of written guidance on best practices aims to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of modern peacekeeping operations by providing a common approach to staff and institutional partners from numerous cultural and professional backgrounds; promoting continuity in a context of high staff turnover; increasing accountability by articulating institutional standards and expectations; and disseminating peacekeeping expertise through knowledge-sharing and training.[2] Providing better support to staff in this area has been identified as an important component of Peace Operations 2010, the internal reform programme aimed at enhancing the management of and professionalism in peacekeeping.

2. The results of a survey conducted by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of the Secretariat in 2004 showed that staff members in the field wanted better institutional guidance. Of the 594 respondents, 50 per cent indicated that they had to recreate guidance (or "reinvent the wheel") "all the time" or "very often", and 46 per cent indicated that they had received no guidance materials or oral guidance upon starting their current job. Only 28 per cent responded that they had received any kind of written instructions in the form of policies, manuals, best practices or otherwise. The survey and the findings of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations highlighted the need for improvements in the lessons-learning system available to peacekeeping personnel at that time.

II. Turning lessons into lessons learned

3. Since 1995, a Lessons Learned Unit has been assisting the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in its efforts to improve peacekeeping operations based on lessons from past experience. Between 1995 and 2000, the Lessons Learned Unit produced lessons-learned studies focusing on the successes and failures of various missions as well as a range of thematic reports. Those studies were drafted mostly by Headquarters staff who travelled to missions to conduct analyses or drafted reports on the basis of conferences that brought together senior managers and experts. It became clear, however, that that methodology for learning lessons was not having a sufficient impact at the Headquarters planning level, nor did it have sufficient reach into the field. Large ex post facto studies of closed missions were not absorbed easily into fast-paced planning and implementation efforts. Trends across missions could not be tracked easily, and, in the absence of adequate

[1] A "best practice" is a way of achieving an objective that has proved its effectiveness in another situation; a "lesson" is an observation that adds to general knowledge about a subject and suggests that something should be repeated or avoided in future; "guidance" refers to instructions, advice or suggestions for the execution of a task.

[2] About 55 per cent of mission personnel have less than two years of peacekeeping experience.

information management systems, it was often difficult for even the most highly motivated staff members to locate documents and apply lessons to their daily work.

4. As noted in the respective reports of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (see A/C.4/55/6, para. 42) and the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (see A/55/305-S/2000/809, para. 229), one important shortcoming of that methodology was the lack of a process for converting lessons into policies and procedures that could guide subsequent operations. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations did not have a system in place for the issuance and dissemination of standing directives. As a result, the availability of guidance materials was limited, their quality uneven and their status often ambiguous, especially with regard to expectations of compliance. Following the report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, the General Assembly agreed in 2001 to resource a reconfigured lessons-learning and policy capability in the form of the Peacekeeping Best Practices Unit in the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations. The Unit became operational in its new form under a D-1 Chief in March 2003 and led a serious internal re-evaluation of the approach taken by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to the identification of best practices. Several important issues were identified during that review process, as described in paragraphs 5 to 7 below.

5. To be "learned", lessons identified need to be validated and endorsed by the Organization in the form of standardized guidance materials, and guidance needs to be disseminated and its implementation monitored. The identification of lessons and good practices does not itself lead to performance improvement. It must be accompanied by a process that seeks to implement improvements in the way operations are managed and conducted, which must also be monitored and re-evaluated on an ongoing basis.

6. Lessons learning is a continuous activity best carried out by practitioners in the field with guidance and support from Headquarters. Given the fluidity of the operational environment and the vast array of new lessons emerging every day in missions, lessons should be captured and used on a continuous basis, not just once a mission has closed. Missions can immediately improve their effectiveness by applying their own lessons learned. On that basis, the bulk of the lessons-learning activity should be in the field, supported by a Headquarters team tasked with maintaining support systems, carrying out trends analyses and identifying good practices and incorporating them into policies and procedures, as well as capturing lessons at the Headquarters level and identifying future priorities for lessons learning.

7. Learning lessons may be a natural process, but sharing and implementing lessons across different missions is not. Although most staff members say that they regularly engage in learning lessons, unless systematic efforts are made to document and share those lessons, their impact remains limited to local teams. Given the geographical dispersion of peacekeeping staff, such efforts should include the standardization of lessons-learned templates and the establishment of electronic platforms for the sharing of best practices. Moreover, given the rapid tempo of activity in peacekeeping operations, staff in the field and at Headquarters can rarely dedicate adequate time to the documentation of lessons, the sharing of best practices or the analysis of emerging policy issues. Dedicated staff members are needed to

facilitate the retention and sharing of specialist knowledge in the field and to focus on policy issues important to the Organization.

III. A new system for the management of best practices in peacekeeping operations

8. Based on this new understanding, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations sought to establish a lessons-learned system that would offer stronger linkages between learning and overall performance improvement. The new system was launched in 2005 following an assessment of the best practices and policy development systems used in some 20 other organizations across the world. It moved the Department away from a static, ex post facto lessons-learned model towards a more strategic approach to performance improvement that links the identification and sharing of best practices to the development of policies, guidelines and procedures that reflect those lessons. These guidance materials form an institutional doctrine that can then be disseminated through training programmes, electronic information-management platforms and the work of Best Practices Officers in missions. The new system incorporates all the elements of a performance improvement process: lessons learning, validation, policy promulgation and dissemination, training, implementation and evaluation.

9. The Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations supported the development of this new learning system (see A/61/19 (Part II), paras. 188-190). In July 2007, the new approach was further institutionalized through the formation of the Policy, Evaluation and Training Division as part of the restructuring of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (see A/C.5/61/L.71). This regroups the Peacekeeping Best Practices Section (renamed from Peacekeeping Best Practices Unit in 2005), the Integrated Training Service and a new evaluation capacity into a single Division dedicated to the systemic enhancement of United Nations peacekeeping. The new Division provides best practices, guidance development and training services to both the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support to ensure that the two Departments operate according to a common doctrine, that lessons and good practices are identified and shared along the whole spectrum of peacekeeping activities, and that peacekeeping training programmes delivered by the United Nations and its external training partners are based on common standards.

10. The effort to improve the way United Nations peacekeeping operations are conducted based on the lessons of experience reflects a wider trend in both the private and public sectors towards the development of "learning organizations". The tools, methodologies and technologies used by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support are similar to those used elsewhere, albeit tailored to reflect the specific nature and diversity of peacekeeping activities and the global dispersion of personnel. Most militaries have invested extensive resources into lessons learning, doctrine development and training capacities. Intranet portals, facilitated e-mail networks and the establishment of dedicated performance-improvement units are increasingly common in Governments and military institutions and in other international organizations, including United Nations system partners. In fact, according to the Office of Internal Oversight Services, the investment of organizations similar in size to the Department of

Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support in lessons learning, guidance development and evaluation functions far exceeds the resources dedicated to those activities in the United Nations Secretariat (see E/AC.51/2006/2, para. 50).

11. The following sections describe in greater detail the key actors, processes and technologies put in place by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support to capture best practices and to develop and disseminate guidance for United Nations peacekeeping personnel.

A. Key actors: Peacekeeping Best Practices Section and Best Practices Officers

The Peacekeeping Best Practices Section

12. The Peacekeeping Best Practices Section is responsible for coordinating all activities related to the identification and sharing of lessons learned and best practices and the development and dissemination of guidance materials for both the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support. The Section's goal is to establish a unified system of experience-based doctrine in order to further strengthen the effectiveness of United Nations peacekeeping and to facilitate the transfer of knowledge across all United Nations peacekeeping operations. The Section also provides analysis and policy recommendations on emerging and cross-cutting issues such as mission integration, protection of civilians and risk management. Separate from its core functions, the Section has advisory capacities on gender and HIV/AIDS, a temporary capacity to deal with child-protection guidance and a civil affairs focal point. Knowledge management and guidance functions are staffed with six Professional posts.

13. Lessons-learned and best practices activities are coordinated by the Knowledge Management Team, which is responsible for (a) coordinating and providing guidance to the network of field-based Best Practices Officers, (b) developing standardized tools for the capture of best practices and lessons, and (c) processing and analysing best practices reports to identify major trends and issues, which are then brought to the attention of the senior management of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support and help shape the policy planning agenda. To promote connections between peacekeepers, the Team focuses on launching and supporting online knowledge networks — communities of practice — linking specialists across missions. The Team also manages efforts to promote and disseminate best practices products through the peace operations Intranet and maintains the Section's public website, which provides reference documents to external partners such as national peacekeeping training centres. In addition, the Knowledge Management Team supports colleagues from both Departments in lessons-learning activities at the Headquarters level.

14. The codification of best practices into policies and procedures is coordinated by the Guidance Team, which is responsible for supporting guidance development activities in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support, including support for the drafting, validation, approval and promulgation of guidance materials. The Team assists with guidance development by specialized components of both Departments and takes the lead in developing guidance materials on cross-cutting issues. The Team also acts as the secretariat for

the Departments' Expanded Senior Management Team, an internal policy review body on peacekeeping issues. The Knowledge Management Team and the Guidance Team work in close collaboration to ensure that lessons identified in the field are reflected in the official guidance materials of both Departments and that field experience helps to inform priority-setting at the Headquarters level.

15. In order to meet the rising demand for best practices and guidance, the Knowledge Management Team and the Guidance Team have been reinforced over the past two years by additional capacity funded by voluntary contributions.

Field-based Best Practices Officers

16. In missions where a Best Practices Officer is deployed, that Officer is a staff member at the P-4 level located in the Office of the Chief of Staff. The Best Practices Officer is a resource servicing all components of a United Nations mission and has a dual role: first, connecting missions with the Departments' headquarters (vertically) as well as with other missions (horizontally), so that his/her mission can benefit from the institutional memory and collective experience contained in the official guidance and best practices developed system-wide; and, secondly, collecting best practices from his/her own mission for the reference of colleagues in the same mission or in other missions and to feed such information into policy development projects at Headquarters. That allows missions to benefit and build on one another's knowledge and experience and ensures that the evolving body of peacekeeping doctrine reflects the lessons learned by practitioners in the field.

17. The Best Practices Officer provides direct assistance to specialized units to capture their lessons and best practices using the range of tools described in section B below. Experience has shown that the temporary, fast-paced nature of peacekeeping operations as well as the high turnover of staff is not conducive to having individuals and teams document their experience without the assistance of a dedicated staff member who can help to create an institutional memory of peacekeeping. The Best Practices Officer facilitates the learning process and ensures that good practices are documented and that the actionable recommendations are forwarded to the mission's leadership for review and action as well as to Headquarters for the reference of other missions and for the development of guidance materials in future.

18. The Best Practices Officer is also responsible for carrying out mission-level research into emerging policy issues raised by the Departments or by the mission leadership on topics such as mission integration or transition and exit strategies. Such initiatives may originate from Headquarters in response to legislative decisions, for the purposes of guidance development, or to meet the needs of a particular operation. For example, the Best Practices Officer in the mission in Burundi, in place since March 2006, has focused on capturing best practices in the areas of strategic planning and United Nations system integration, two issues of particular importance to the mission as well as to the peacekeeping system as a whole.

19. The central role played by Best Practices Officers in the sharing of best practices between missions and the identification of lessons for incorporation into future guidance has been recognized by the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, which recommended that the function become a feature of peacekeeping operations through the initial deployment of at least one officer, where appropriate

(A/61/19 (Part II), para. 190). As at December 2007, one Best Practices Officer post had been established in roughly one third of all operations, namely in the United Nations Mission in the Sudan (UNMIS), the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi (BINUB), the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra-Leone, the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Although several of the deployments occurred only during the past year, the preliminary results discussed in section IV suggest that this capacity is already contributing to enhancing the efficiency, effectiveness and further professionalization of United Nations peacekeeping operations.

B. Key processes: linking lessons learned to guidance and doctrine

20. The Best Practices Toolbox was launched in September 2005 to facilitate and standardize the capture of best practices and lessons learned by peacekeeping personnel in the field and at Headquarters. The Toolbox includes the following four simple learning methodologies, which are common in many large and complex organizations: (a) the After Action Review is a collaborative review of a project or action that allows staff to reflect on and document what happened, why it happened, what went well and what needs to be improved; (b) the Survey of Practice is a snapshot of how practitioners carry out a certain function or activity — for example, how missions are managing the recruitment of local staff; (c) the End of Assignment Report is an assessment by senior staff of the implementation of their mandate responsibilities and of the managerial practices of the Organization that contributed to or hampered the achievement of mandated objectives; and (d) the Handover Note is created by a staff member who is about to leave a position with a view to assisting a successor in carrying out his/her duties. The tools are designed to ensure that staff members share valuable institutional information, with the aim of enabling other colleagues to do their jobs more effectively and efficiently.

21. Toolbox reports are collected, and often initiated and drafted, by Best Practices Officers. The Peacekeeping Best Practices Section analyses the reports on a regular basis and develops a trends analysis, which is submitted to the senior management of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support for review. That analysis provides a mechanism for prioritizing policy and guidance development based on the needs of the field. The work of the Best Practices Officers and of the Section is critical to ensuring that lessons identified in the field are reflected in guidance and training materials. It is through the issuance of guidance and training materials that the lessons identified through the Best Practices Toolbox are "learned" by the Organization. As such, the capture of best practices is the first step in the cycle leading to systemic performance improvement.

22. Guidance materials developed by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support have been standardized into four types of documents: policy directives, standard operating procedures, guidelines and manuals. The templates and drafting guides for these materials follow the templates of the International Organization for Standardization. High-level and cross-cutting guidance is reviewed by the Expanded Senior Management Team and approved by the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations. Increasing numbers of

materials are being produced by the two Departments. Moreover, guidance materials are also being developed jointly with other Offices and Departments such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Department of Political Affairs of the Secretariat and its Electoral Assistance Division, as well as other United Nations system partners, to support more integrated and efficient performance in the field. Once policy and guidance materials are approved, documents are posted on the peace operations Intranet and further disseminated through official code cables, a newsletter, communities of practice, the work of Best Practices Officers and training programmes.

C. Enabling technologies: the peace operations Intranet and communities of practice

The peace operations Intranet

23. Following a recommendation made by the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations in its report, the peace operations Intranet was launched in November 2006 to facilitate the dissemination of guidance and best practices materials to the 20 field missions led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. The Intranet is a resource shared by that Department and the Department of Field Support and reaches all peacekeeping personnel providing standard information regardless of location, job level or mandate. It serves as an easily accessible central repository for obtaining official guidance and accessing lessons learned from other operations.

24. Particular efforts have been made to ensure that the database is available to every field mission, even the most remote, within the limitations of the unique technical infrastructure maintained for peacekeeping missions. For example, the database is replicated locally in every mission to allow staff to download large files without taxing a mission's Internet network bandwidth. Best Practices Officers have been among the principal contributors of materials, primarily through Toolbox reports collected in field missions. The database will continually evolve in response to input from the field and is considered a living information source.

Communities of practice

25. To complement the Toolbox and the Intranet, the Peacekeeping Best Practices Section developed and launched communities of practice, which are facilitated e-mail networks that connect specialists with their counterparts in other missions and at Headquarters so that they can request, share and collect information that will assist them in their work. Members can pose queries on the network and receive responses that transmit lessons and good practices. Communities are most often used to share best practices in areas where guidance has either not yet been developed or is not needed, or where limited material is available on the Intranet. In addition to the original Rule of Law Network, communities of practice have been set up in nine specialized fields, including conduct and discipline, planning, gender, civil affairs and property management.

IV. Measuring impact

26. Although the components of the new best practices system have been under development since 2005, an early impact analysis provides an indication of the gains made to date as a result of those efforts. Several proxy indicators of performance have been developed to track progress. These are (a) outputs of the system, (b) the perceived utility of guidance and best practices materials by end users, based on a field survey of usage, and (c) examples of efficiency and effectiveness gains. In response to the specific request made by the General Assembly regarding impact on mission planning, this section concludes with an assessment of the contribution of best practices in this area.

A. Outputs

27. Between September 2005 and November 2007, a total of 78 After Action Reviews, 129 End of Assignment Reports and eight Surveys of Practice were drafted and processed. In the same period, three trends analyses were presented to the Expanded Senior Management Team as part of the policy planning agenda of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support.

28. Since the establishment of a guidance framework for both Departments in April 2006, a total of 24 policy directives, eight guidelines, 14 Surveys of Practice and four manuals have been issued on a wide range of operational tasks. In addition, the Section developed a major doctrinal document entitled "United Nations Peacekeeping Operations Principles and Guidelines" (also referred to as the Capstone doctrine), which sets out the principles and concepts underpinning the planning, management and conduct of contemporary United Nations peacekeeping operations.

29. The peace operations Intranet has proven popular among staff in the field and at Headquarters. Since its launch in May 2006, the Intranet has registered more than 50,000 downloads of guidance, best practices and mission documents. The United Nations Military Observers Handbook, for example, was downloaded more than 1,600 times, while an After Action Review on the response of MONUC to armed clashes in Kinshasa was consulted 455 times. The database currently contains more than 1,700 documents organized into a coherent framework that includes all existing guidance, lessons-learned and best practices materials as well as hundreds of mission-generated materials, which can be used by other missions to increase efficiency.

30. Communities of practice are also used extensively as a tool for knowledge-sharing among specialists deployed in different missions. Membership already exceeds 1,450 staff members across 10 expert communities, with nearly 2,000 library documents and almost 700 direct and moderated exchanges of good practices occurring through queries and replies. Fourteen requests for the establishment of new communities have been received by the Peacekeeping Best Practices Section in areas as diverse as procurement, political affairs and translation. Demand for communities has been high, in part as a result of the surge in missions, as many new staff members are being deployed with limited peacekeeping experience and without a personal network of experienced colleagues.

B. Survey of field personnel

31. Based on its 2004 survey, the Section conducted a new survey in 2007 to assess the progress made in the provision of guidance and best practices support to staff in the field. Of a total of 1,130 respondents — double the number who responded to the 2004 survey — 85 per cent reported having consulted guidance and best practices reports to help them in their work. Of those who did consult materials, 53 per cent found them "critical" or "very useful", and 38 per cent found them "somewhat useful". Of the staff who found those materials "somewhat useful", "very useful" or "critical", 60 per cent noted that the materials had made them more knowledgeable in their subject area, 22 per cent reported having saved time as a result, 19 per cent noted that the materials had helped them to better allocate resources, 30 per cent said the materials had helped improve planning, and 36 per cent reported that they had avoided replicating past mistakes as a result.[3] The percentage of staff reporting that they had received neither a handover note nor a handover session nor written guidance upon entry on duty fell from 46 per cent in 2004 to 32 per cent in 2007.

32. However, nearly 50 per cent of all respondents in 2007 still said they had to reinvent the wheel "often" or "all the time", a predictable result given that progress towards the establishment of a comprehensive peacekeeping doctrine has been made in only a few areas so far. In addition, 71 per cent of respondents reported that they personally identified lessons "very often" or "all the time" in their work, suggesting that the sharing of best practices continues to offer great potential in terms of efficiency gains in peacekeeping operations. Of the total number of respondents, 55 per cent suggested that "better access to best practices materials" would be useful in their work, indicating that further efforts are required in promoting the dissemination tools.

33. The results show that the best practices and guidance system is becoming an important working tool for peacekeepers, as increasing numbers of staff members are being served by written guidance and lessons-learned materials. However, they also reveal that further efforts are needed to develop materials for all peacekeeping functions and to integrate learning processes into the daily work of staff members.

C. Improvements in efficiency and effectiveness

34. The following examples provide a qualitative indication of how the tools developed since 2005 have helped staff in the field carry out their functions more efficiently.

35. One example that is illustrative of how the various components of the best practices and guidance system work effectively together is the recent development by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of a policy directive on quick-impact projects. Following the launch of the Civil Affairs community of practice in November 2005, one of the first issues to be raised by members of the network was the confusion that existed over the management and purpose of quick-impact projects. Based on the concerns raised within the Civil Affairs community, a Survey of Practice was initiated by the Section to collect information about good practice

[3] Respondents were allowed to choose more than one response.

and lessons learned in the implementation of quick-impact projects across missions. The need for a policy was established and reinforced by the General Assembly in its resolution 60/266. The Section prepared a draft policy based on the best practices identified through the survey. The draft policy was discussed extensively with the members of the Civil Affairs community of practice and refined as a result. The policy directive on quick-impact projects was issued in February 2007 and is now the definitive guidance on the scope and management of quick-impact projects and on the conditions under which budgetary requests can be made for quick-impact project programmes.

36. In an illustration of the value of guidance materials for mission personnel, managers involved in planning for the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur and working in Darfur during the mission start-up phase used the draft mission start-up field guide, which outlines the key structures to be established and tasks to be accomplished in the early phase of a mission. The field guide, expected to be published in spring 2008, was put together on the basis of the lessons learned from previous start-ups of multidimensional operations. It includes a database of generic documents (forms, templates, terms of reference, inter alia) which can be recycled by new missions, further reducing the need to "reinvent the wheel" in those critical early months. The standard approaches to start-up as well as the documents database will result in dividends in terms of time saved and a better focus on initial priorities.

37. Some of the tools help improve efficiency by allowing missions to reuse materials developed in other missions and shared directly between them. For example, by reusing a safe-driving training module developed in UNOCI and shared through communities of practice, BINUB and UNMOGIP were able to save time and resources that would have otherwise been allotted to the development of the programme. In another example, UNIFIL submitted a query in March 2007 to the Best Practices community seeking advice on an administrative instruction on duty-related travel for military and civilian personnel. Mission examples were shared by the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara, UNMIT, the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea, BINUB, UNMIS and UNMOGIP, enabling UNIFIL to create its own model based on other missions' best practices.

38. As an example of a mission improving its own performance based on lessons identified through the work of Best Practices Officers, MONUC was able to improve the quality of its operational planning in response to the unrest in North Kivu in 2007 by referring to the lessons-learned exercise conducted following the Bukavu crisis of 2004. The lessons-learned exercise was critical to improving the quality of planning, especially given that most staff members present in the mission in 2004 had left by 2007. Moreover, the lessons from that and other crises are being used to inform the drafting of a policy on command and control in United Nations peacekeeping operations.

39. In other examples of internal mission learning that also helped other missions, the UNMIS Best Practices Officer conducted an After Action Review on a helicopter-crash response that enabled the Mission to immediately refine and improve its crisis-management procedures. The same review has been downloaded for reference by 59 staff members in other missions since its publication. Similarly, the Best Practices Officer in UNMIT facilitated After Action Reviews between the three rounds of elections in Timor-Leste in April, May (presidential) and June

(parliamentary) 2007. The learning exercises led to the improvement of procedures for the second and third rounds and averted a number of difficulties as a result of the lessons learned in the first round. In planning its support for elections, the Mission had also benefited from reports on electoral support from Burundi and Afghanistan. The After Action Reviews produced by UNMIT are currently of benefit to the Mission in Nepal, where elections are scheduled. A review of the elections held in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2006 further added to this stock of knowledge on elections support and will benefit further guidance development on support for elections by peacekeeping operations.

D. The contribution of best practices to mission planning

40. In support of the United Nations guidance note on the integrated mission planning process, issued in 2006, a number of efforts have focused on the development of further guidance and best practices for planning activities. Most specifically, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations is developing implementation guidelines in four areas of the process and hosted a three-day workshop in 2007 at which planners from many parts of the United Nations system at Headquarters and the field level were able to discuss how their experiences and best practices could be reflected in the guidelines. The workshop and subsequent consultations are intended to ensure that the final guidance products help planners address the concrete challenges they face in operationalizing the integrated mission planning process methodology. In addition, daily exchanges among planners in the field and at Headquarters take place through a dedicated community of practice on planning.

41. The mission start-up field guide and a risk management policy directive are currently being finalized to support planning staff at Headquarters and on the ground in deploying a new mission. Best Practices Officers in the field continue to collect lessons on mission-planning efforts with a view to strengthening system-wide guidance. To date, Best Practices Officers have conducted After Action Reviews on a range of planning experiences, including strategic planning and United Nations integration in Sierra Leone; preparation of an integrated peacebuilding strategy in Burundi; and the United Nations Operation in Burundi force drawdown. In the same vein, the Peacekeeping Best Practices Section conducted After Action Reviews at Headquarters on the Darfur planning process and on planning for cooperation between the United Nations and the peacekeeping force of the European Union (EUFOR) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in order to capture lessons at the strategic level. The findings of those reviews have been available to those involved in other planning efforts. The team planning the deployment of the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad, for example, has benefited from the templates and generic planning documents prepared as a follow-up to the After Action Review on the planning for cooperation between the United Nations and EUFOR in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

42. Various specialist areas in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support also continue to develop guidance for the planning of mandate implementation in their respective fields. For example, the Peacekeeping Best Practices Section Gender Unit is in the process of finalizing guidelines for Gender Advisers and Gender Focal Points in United Nations peacekeeping

operations that are aimed at providing a standard operational framework for gender mainstreaming in both multidimensional and traditional missions. In addition, the Gender Unit has developed, with the Office of Operations, guidelines for Political Affairs Officers on gender mainstreaming, and, with the Department of Political Affairs, joint guidelines on enhancing the role of women in post-conflict electoral processes.

43. Similarly, the United Nations integrated disarmament, demobilization and reintegration standards provide direction and guidance to those engaged in preparing, implementing and supporting disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes. Although the standards were developed by the United Nations for programmes taking place in peacekeeping contexts, the policies and guidance contained therein are also applicable to those taking place in non-peacekeeping contexts. The standards bring together knowledge, lessons learned and good practice in 24 different areas ranging from basic concepts, policies and strategies to programme planning, design, management, monitoring and evaluation and cross-cutting issues relating to women, gender and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, and HIV/AIDS and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. The standards were launched in December 2006 and now constitute the key reference document for planners and practitioners in the field of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration.

V. The way ahead

44. The long-term goal of the learning system of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support is to develop a comprehensive body of accessible and updated guidance for United Nations peacekeeping activities. Such guidance should evolve continuously with the lessons learned in the field and at Headquarters and should be disseminated through training and sustained by a continuous flow of knowledge among the peacekeeping community. It is essential that we build upon the experiences arising from the scale of current deployments and ensure that today's peacekeepers receive the best possible support from their colleagues around the globe.

45. Even with the small capacity now in place, transposing today's lessons into the future and sharing best practices across continents will remain an intrinsically difficult task. A lesson learned in one mission at a particular point in time will not always be applicable to another situation. Systems for sharing lessons and providing guidance should not become rigid or dogmatic in their approach. The Organization must be able to apply its knowledge to improving future operations, but must continue to do so using innovative and adaptive approaches. The new evaluation capacity in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, which is designed to monitor mission progress towards mandate implementation, will provide a much-needed mechanism for assessing the validity and relevance of guidance materials in their daily application. At the same time, training plays a critical role in translating guidance materials into individual knowledge and skills. Thus it will be a priority for the Policy, Evaluation and Training Division to strengthen the linkages among the best practices and guidance system and evaluation and training.

46. The provision of effective support to the front lines of United Nations peacekeeping is the core responsibility of the Department of Peacekeeping

Operations and the Department of Field Support. In modern peacekeeping, support is no longer measurable solely in terms of the timely provision of people, funds and materiel. Today, it also includes the capacity to apply institutional knowledge to help solve new challenges and avoid any recurrence of problems of the past. More than 100,000 personnel will rotate through United Nations peacekeeping operations in 2008. Many of those young men and women — soldiers, police officers and civilians from all walks of life — have never served in a United Nations peacekeeping operation. They come from diverse backgrounds with legitimate expectations that the institution that has deployed them into difficult post-conflict environments will furnish them with access to the knowledge and guidance they need to do their work.